

**AN EPISODE IN A LABRADOR HOSPITAL**

By MAUD A. BASSELL, R.N., M.D., S.F.

Indian Harbor Hospital, Labrador

It was a quaint little Old-World settlement nestling amid wild rocks, as if seeking shelter from the still wilder storms that raged outside. Even at the height of the season it boasted no large resident population and knew nothing of the busy cities that lay beyond. In this was its charm. There was no sound of tramping feet, no rumbling of heavy wheels, no hum of the toiling throng—nothing invaded the silence that reigned.

Out in the harbor a few schooners were anchored, lapped lazily by the rippling water, their brown or white sails unfurled in the sunshine, and around the shore were the picturesque fish-stages reflected in the cool, clear depths.

In full view of the harbor and on slightly elevated ground stood the hospital, one of the finest buildings to be seen on the shore. Glancing at it from the outside, one could not but admire, but, having once entered, the place became revered by the fact that here was daily fought the battle 'twixt life and death. Not that the place was dull and cheerless, nor that those inside wore very long faces, but the very routine of every-day life, the quiet method of each day's duties, told that life in this Palace of Pain was no empty dream.

About nine o'clock one bright September morning there sat in the out-patients' hall a solitary figure. It was an old man of fine build, fairly well dressed, and apparently hale and hearty. As he waited for the appearance of the doctor he glanced anxiously round, and now and again a footstep passing through the inner hall would cause him to look up sharply. At length the door opened, and with hasty step the doctor passed through into the dispensary with the usual query, "You want to see me?"

"Yes, sir, please," and the old man rose half-hesitatingly.

"Come in, then," was the reply, and with a slight limp, which evidently caused him pain, the patient walked into the adjoining room.

The door was closed, but only for a moment. The next the doctor emerged, and, summoning the sister, he informed her that a bed was required in the ward for examination.

Up the stairs the old man came, slowly, somewhat nervously, his face occasionally twitching with pain. Along the short corridor and through the first door on the left he gradually made his way, and, finding himself in a cheery, cosey-looking ward, he looked relieved. On



A CHEERY COSEY-LOOKING WARD



INDIAN HARBOR HOSPITAL "NESTLING AMID WILD ROCKS"

either side were beds covered with scarlet blankets, on the delicate blue walls hung large colored pictures, and he saw too that men like himself were watching with kindly interest the new admission.

Meeting the sister half-way along, he hurried to explain with a friendly nod, "I'm very bad, ma'am, very bad 'n deed."

"I'm sorry to hear that, skipper," was the reply, and, motioning him to a chair, she continued, "Well, tell me what is the matter?"

"I's ter'ble scalded, ma'am, ter'ble scalded; I's nigh racked with the pain on't,"—and, waving his hand over the spot, he added,—“fact, ma'am, it's preeety well scoured, every inch o' my body; it have, ma'am, it have,” he reiterated.

"No, no, skipper, not quite so bad as that, is it, now?" said the sister, glancing up at the serious old weather-beaten countenance, and endeavoring at the same time to loosen the clothing as gently as possible.

"Well, no, ma'am, perhaps not—you knows best," and the old man sighed wearily.

A few moments more and the doctor stood at the bedside. The man watched closely and anxiously as the extent and degree of the scalded surface were ascertained, venturing now and again a remark as to the probable result of such an accident. An order was given for his admission and a thermometer placed in his mouth.

"Open your mouth, Tom, now,"—suited the action to the word,—“under your tongue. That's right; now close your lips.”

"Yes, ma'am, yes, certainly," was the reply, the thermometer in dangerous contact with his teeth.

"Don't talk with that in your mouth, please," said the sister somewhat severely.

"All right, ma'am, all right, I won't talk," and he lay still in good-natured obedience.

On its withdrawal he looked suspiciously at the fragile glass rod with the silver bulb, probably never having seen such a thing before and feeling none too sure what it was capable of.

"That's a cute little machine, ma'am. What's it fer?"

"To tell me how hot your body is," replied the sister, not a little amused at his genuine interest.

"My body, ma'am? Aye, that's hot right enough. I's been like a livin' furnace fer the last two days. I has, ma'am, really," and he rubbed his hand over his face with a circular movement, then nodded his head very impressively, as if to assure her of the truth of his statement.

"Yes, I dare say you have. Well, now, keep quite still and doctor

will be up to see you again. You'll feel so much more comfortable when you've been attended to."

"Bless yer, ma'am. I's tons more comfortable now than I were," and he blinked his eyes and smiled approvingly. "Do you think I'll get better now I'm in here?"

"I hope so, skipper, we shall do our best for you," came the reply from the other side of the ward, for sister was hurrying to prepare the dressings for the doctor's arrival.

Not a moment too soon, for even then the well-known footstep was heard ascending the stairs, and in a remarkably short space of time the case was well in hand. In many places the burn was very deep, having an irregular circumference of over four feet, and it needed not only skill but patient care to dress it as painlessly as possible. It was well he had reached the hospital. One dreaded to think what the results might have been had such a case been left to the mercy of unskilled hands amid the cramped, close, unkempt quarters of a fishing-schooner.

"That feels easier, now, doesn't it?" asked the doctor as the dressing was completed.

"Oh, my, yes, sir, indeed it do. I feels lovely."

"Now tell me all about it," and, taking a seat at the bedside, the usual queries were proceeded with.

"When did it happen?"

"Two days gone, sir."

"How was it done?"

"The gel, sir. The gel on our boat she hoisted the kittle on the edge o' the stove, the boat gave a lurch, and over she comes, steamin', o' top o' me. I were lying on a bunk at the side—a kind o' shelf, sir, see? The water were scaldin' 'ot, and I were asleep till the smarting woke me, and I sez to myself, sez I, 'Your time's come, mate—you's scalded to death right enough. Oh, it were orful, sir,'" and the man shuddered at the remembrance of it.

"Why didn't you get someone to bring you to hospital at once? It would have saved you so much pain if you had," said the doctor kindly.

"Couldn't, sir. We was only a small crowd and couldn't spare a hand. I were 'oping, a'ter all, it weren't going to be much."

"In Ice Tickle you said your schooner was?" and the patient assenting, he was asked how he had come, no boat having entered the harbor that morning.

"Walked, sir, walked," was the very matter-of-fact reply. "It were a tough job, sir. I took a lot of spells, and I were most afeared I'd never do it."

It was true. This old man of sixty-three, so terribly scalded, had walked nearly four miles to see a doctor—and a four miles equal to double the distance on an even road, for there were no roads there, no made footpaths of any description. A journey by foot meant clambering over rugged rocks, toiling uphill and downhill, scarcely, if ever, enjoying an even foothold.

He was a curious old man, extremely patient, always good-tempered, and most obliging—that was, in making promises—he was not always so obliging in keeping them.

So awkwardly placed were his wounds that special bandages were made for him, tied in four places with tape, and it seemed his hobby to discover the mechanism of a bow, for repeatedly these were found untied shortly after dressing. At length, after he had played the trick several times, the sister considered it best to speak to him.

"Now, Tom," she commenced very seriously after tying the usual bow, "this must not happen again. You must leave the bandage alone when doctor has tied it."

"Yes, ma'am, yes, I will—I mean sister," he added by way of apology.

"But you've promised that before, and yet I've found the bow untied. You know you're hindering it from healing by getting the dressing rucked up."

"Yes, sister, yes, I am; perhaps you're right. We'll have a new state of affairs, and I'll steer clear o' bows." While looking up with a most decided nod he continued, "I won't do it agen, ma'am. I'll turn over a new leaf."

Surely after such promises all would be well. But woe betide the too sanguine sister! Scarcely had she left the ward when she was summoned by a groan from the skipper.

"Are you in pain, Tom?" she asked, turning back the bedclothes to examine the spot.

"Yes, sister, racks o' pain."

But by this time the bandaged area was uncovered and the tapes hung loosely in opposite directions.

"Why, the bandage is untied again! Tom, what is your promise worth?"

"Eh, ma'am?" he queried, half shading his eyes. But the question had been heard and his reply was waited for.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he murmured at last.

"Sorry!" echoed the sister; "but why do you disobey me like this?"

"I don't, ma'am, I don't," he half whimpered.

"But you do constantly, Tom, and it won't do, you know."

"No, ma'am, it won't do; you're right, ma'am, it won't never do," and he nodded in full agreement.

"Well, do you understand that that bandage is not to be touched?"

"Yes, ma'am, I understand; I won't touch it."

"Will you obey me or not, Tom?" The question was slowly and emphatically asked.

"Certainly, ma'am, certainly I will."

"Do you mean that now? Can I trust you?"

"Yes, ma'am, you can trust me; of course I won't do it if I say I won't."

How could one doubt such sincerity of tone?

"That's right. Then you promise me you won't touch that bandage again? This is the last time I shall try you."

"No, ma'am, of course not, ma'am; I won't aggravate you any more; I won't go near the bandage," and he lay back, evidently intending to keep his promise. But either his memory failed or his will power deserted him, or his hands refused to obey his wishes, but certain it was that his fingers shortly after were again entangled in tape. He was proficient in promises, an expert in knots, like most fishermen, and, to be generous, we will only add that but for failure of memory he would have made a model patient.

Weeks passed away, and skipper Tom was standing in the hall for the last time.

"Well, sister, good-by, and good luck to yer. I'll never forget this place, it's a darlin' place," and a tear stole into his eye as he reached out his hand.

"Good-by, Tom. Be careful not to get cold going home."

"I will, ma'am, I will," and the man of a thousand promises walked out with a firm step and a glad heart, for he was going home.

It was an Old-World settlement and an Old-World coast with many Old-World ideas, but many a fisherman relates how his life was saved by the timely help from that little hospital nestling among the rocks of Labrador.

